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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, May 20, 1942

SUBJECT: "Price Ceilings." Information from Consumers' Counsel Division,
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Have you noticed the price ceilings in stores? They were posted last Monday, to keep the cost of living down. They were posted because the Government wants to make your dollar buy as much tomorrow as it does today. Now it's up to you to hold those ceilings on prices, to stop inflation now, and after the war.

What is a price ceiling? It's the highest price any seller may charge you -- the highest price you will have to pay during the war. According to the law, no seller may charge you more than the highest price he charged for most of his goods and services during March 1942.

You'll notice, if you haven't already, that ceiling prices vary from store to store. That's all right, because every seller has his own ceiling price. It is the highest price he happened to charge for that particular article or service in March. He may charge you less now, but he must not charge you one cent more than his ceiling price.

It's up to consumers to observe those price ceilings and help enforce the law, and the Consumers' Counsel Division of the U. S. Department of Agriculture has some tips on how to do it.

Please don't be too hard on your storekeeper if he hasn't put his price ceilings up as promptly as he should. Give him a chance to figure out how much he charged the average customer for cost-of-living items last March. Only really uncooperative storekeepers should be reported to the local OPA office. Leave price enforcement to OPA. It's their job. Help them, but don't try to do their



work for them.

It's your job to educate yourself and your neighbor on price regulations and how they work. That way, you'll save yourself money and really help the war effort.

Remember that, by law, ceiling prices must be posted only for cost-of-living items. As their name implies, these are goods or services which are considered most important to people in their daily lives. Other goods will have price ceilings, too, but it isn't necessary for the seller to post them, although the consumer may ask to see the ceiling price if he desires.

Learn to recognize ceiling price items. In foods, remember that ceilings have been nailed down on most products that are processed or manufactured, imported, canned, frozen, dried, pickled, or baked. Add to these fresh whole milk, fresh skim milk, buttermilk, fluid cream, and ice cream; bread and bakery goods, beef, pork and their products, and peanuts, and your grocery price ceiling list is practically complete.

Most raw foods, coming to the consumer just as they were taken from the farm have no price ceilings. You'll find fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh eggs and poultry, fresh fish and seafood, all without ceilings. In addition, there are no ceilings on butter, cheese, evaporated and condensed milk; lamb and mutton; dried prunes and beans; all nuts except peanuts, and all flours except packaged mixes for cake and biscuit making.

Since ceiling prices vary from store to store, it will pay you to shop around for good quality and low price. Remember that stores are permitted to sell below the ceiling price, but not above it, and that the spirit of competition still burns among them.

Stores want customers, ceilings or no ceilings, and they'll try to attract

them not only by keeping prices down, but also by giving better quality at their ceiling price than other places do. With war production taking its toll of goods that used to go to consumers, there is bound to be a lowering of quality in many fields. Wise consumers will look for United States grades on products, to make sure they are getting the same quality they bought back in March, the ceiling month. There are A, B and C grades for many canned goods, and Government grade standards for meat, eggs, fruits and vegetables.

One thing more to remember about foods. There are no price ceilings on the food you buy in restaurants or delicatessen stores or at hot dog stands -- if you buy it and eat it there. But if you buy it to take out, and what you buy comes under a price ceiling, you pay no more than the ceiling price.

Not only are there ceiling prices for foods, but for clothing, too. Consumers will have to rely more and more on good buymanship to make sure they are getting quality. A storekeeper must post prices, but he doesn't have to post quality. See for yourself that what you buy measures up to standards for workmanship, style, and material. One way of telling is by examining labels. Labels on lots of clothing items tell you what they are made of. This is a Federal Trade Commission ruling. In addition, there are grades for sheets and pillow cases, as a result of an OPA order. Standards for other products may be worked out, too.

Shelter also has a ceiling price. Maximum rents are being fixed in Defense areas, where war work has brought about a shortage of housing and higher rents. Since two-thirds of us live in Defense areas, these ceilings will affect most Americans. The top rent recommended in most localities is the rent paid on March 1, 1942. For others, the top is set at different dates in 1941. Your nearest OPA office will tell you the ceiling rent price date in your town.

There will be no price ceilings on public utilities, but there will be price ceilings on many services on July 1. In general, services to goods will have ceiling prices, while those to persons will have none. Thus a man who polishes a car, has a ceiling price for his services, while a manicurist who polishes fingernails, will have none. The top prices of March will be the top prices for the duration.

Price ceilings have been nailed down to keep the cost of living steady during uncertain war times. It's everyone's duty -- consumer and retailer and wholesaler alike -- to cooperate and make the law work. This is no game, but a serious war measure. You can do your part in three ways: First, educate yourself on price regulations and how they operate. Second, know when and where, and in what detail to report violations. Third, realize that you have a personal responsibility to buy only at or below the ceiling price.

